

CARMEN CICERO

CICERO'S MYSTERIES

A man in trench coat and fedora is seen hurrying through Carmen Cicero's moonlit world. He strides; more than that, he epitomizes striding, as though driven either by some urgent need or in perpetual flight from some peril.

Whichever the case--the circumstance is unclear--he hurries to no apparent avail. He, we, are stuck, dreamlike, in some never-to-be-resolved drama. We know him from recent acrylic on canvas paintings such as *The Red Shoes* of 1999-2000, *The Great Mountain*, '03, *The Ruisdael Enigma*, '04, and we find him in recent watercolors as well, some of them reworkings of the larger paintings.

When not on foot he may drive (*A Truro Road*) or fly (unseen in the airplane of *Flying Low*) and in one notable instance without a plane (*Duchamp Flies*). We know this guy from somewhere: our dreams perhaps or any number of fictions involving misdeeds and mystery, maybe a film noir of the

Forties. As with all dream life, we come, on reflection, to recognize the dreamed man as the one who dreams, which is to say, the viewer as well as the artist. Cicero's sensibility is not hermetic; he does not deliberately obscure his subjective projection. This harried figure is a familiar *persona*, one that we know from countless narratives, popular and literary, and, as is the case with most protagonists, he is one's own anxiously questing self.

The landscape, the ground across which this figure moves, is also strangely familiar: a country road or wooded site that may call to mind Hopper's or Frost's often ominous rural America or Dante's mid-life *selva oscura*. A Bachelardian poetics animates the toy-like cars, trains, boats and planes that have figured in Cicero's work from early on. We might be reminded of Charron's ferry, the Little Train that Could, Maurice Sendak's boats and planes, or Philip Guston's funky,

fugitive cars. One imagines these vehicles as instruments not only of transportation but also as possible agents of transformation from one realm to another.

The sites and figures of Cicero's narratives derive both from his own Cape Cod and Manhattan surroundings and from art of the past. He may quote directly from Botticelli, Ruisdael, Rembrandt, Velasquez, or De Chirico, but these instances are not a matter of appropriation. That is, they do not presume control of the masterworks to which they refer but, instead, attest to their habitation and shared psychological resonances in our collective consciousness. *Castle Hill Road* could have been conceived by Hopper but for the blue person approaching from the right, a monochromatic figure of a different order from the rest of the picture and of a different scale, so that he looms like